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Film to Celebrate Overland Park's Roots

Strang Line put the city on track to becoming a leading suburban community

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. | The Overland Park Historical Society today announced the upcoming premiere of a new documentary film, *Rails to Suburbia: The Strang Line and Overland Park*. The film will debut October 19 at the Rio Theatre, and it will have its broadcast premiere on KCPT later this fall.

“Immediately at the door of Kansas City lies the garden spot of the world,” an early promotional brochure proclaimed. While founder William B. Strang, Jr. may have overstated the case a bit, his planned community was nonetheless a desirable suburban retreat, almost from the start. Today, Overland Park is the second-largest city in Kansas – a place to work as well as to live, with more jobs than downtown Kansas City, and with a growing array of cultural and recreational amenities.

All of this activity requires good transportation, and as *Rails to Suburbia* recounts, transport was central to Strang’s vision. His interurban railway ran from Kansas City to Olathe, providing a fast and efficient commute. An able promoter, Strang enticed new homeowners with luxurious railcars and with a host of attractions that included fishing lakes, a dance hall, a baseball stadium, and even air shows – a huge draw in 1909, the infancy of aviation.

By the 1920s, automobiles began to supplant the Strang Line as Overland Park’s favorite way to get around. While the new technology meant unfettered mobility, it also brought decentralized sprawl and reduced air quality, leading many to ask if light rail is an idea whose time has come – again.

Rails to Suburbia tells the story through vintage photos, interviews with local historians and public officials, and narration from actor Michael Gross. (“Family Ties”) A film premiere will be held at 7:30 PM on October 19 at the Rio Theatre, 7204 W. 80th St. An after-party will be held at the Culinary Center of Kansas City, 7920 Santa Fe Dr., from 8:30-10:00 PM. Tickets are \$25, and all proceeds will benefit the Overland Park Historical Society, which seeks to build a permanent museum. Tickets may be purchased in advance from the Society at P.O. Box 4022, Overland Park KS 66204, or by calling the Society at 913-381-8867.

The Overland Park Historical Society’s mission is to collect, preserve, research, exhibit, and educate the public about the history of the region of Overland Park, Kansas and the surrounding area from prehistoric times to the present. It is a 501(c)3 organization.